

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1.-17. (Canceled).

19. (Previously Presented) The combination of claim 44, wherein said masking dye is present in said solution at an amount sufficient to reduce non-specific background light from said solution by at least 30% compared to the non-specific background light emitted from said solution in the absence of said masking dye.

20. (Previously Presented) The combination of claim 44, wherein said masking dye is present in said solution at an amount sufficient to reduce non-specific background light from said solution by at least 50% compared to the non-specific background light emitted from said solution in the absence of said masking dye.

21. (Previously Presented) The combination of claim 44, wherein said masking dye is present in said solution at an amount sufficient to reduce non-specific background light from said solution by at least 70% compared to the non-specific background light emitted from said solution in the absence of said masking dye.

22. (Previously Presented) The combination of claim 44, wherein said fluorescent dye detects a voltage across the membrane of said biological cell.

23. (Previously Presented) The combination of claim 44, wherein said masking dye comprises Brilliant Black (tetrasodium 4-acetamido-5-hydroxy-6-[7-sulfonato-4-(4-sulfonatophenylazo)-1-naphthylazo] naphthalene-1,7-disulfonate).

24. (Previously Presented) The combination of claim 44, wherein said masking dye improves the optical signal-to-noise-ratio by at least 300% compared to the optical signal-to-noise-ratio of said biomedical assay in the absence of said masking dye.

25.-43. (Canceled)

44. (Previously Presented) A combination for performing a biomedical assay, comprising:

a) a fluorescent dye,

wherein said fluorescent dye is permeant to the membrane of a biological cell; and

b) a masking dye,

wherein said masking dye is substantially impermeant to the membrane of said biological cell, wherein said masking dye has an absorption spectrum that overlaps with the emission and/or excitation spectrum of said fluorescent dye,

wherein said masking dye does not specifically bind to said membrane of said biological cell, and

wherein said masking dye is present in a solution at an amount sufficient to reduce nonspecific background light emitted from said solution by at

least 10% compared to the non-specific background light emitted from said solution in the absence of said masking dye.